

MATTHEW'S STORY: MOVING INTO A PLACE OF MY OWN



Matthew after just moving from his parent home into his own flat

"I think I'll start my story when I was about 18, I was probably still at school doing year 12 (VCAL) then. This is when I first told my parents that I wanted to move out, it was in the car. Surprised Mum didn't have a Heart Attack & cause an accident! I'm now 22 and permanently living in my own private rental place (have been for about 18 months I think). It might have taken a while, but it was well worth it. Even to this day, sometimes I still 'pinch myself' that I'm where I am today. This is largely thanks to Deb Rouget & the 'gang' at PLA, and my parents, who I'm very grateful to. I go down the street and do most of my own shopping. One day, I'm thinking I might make a documentary on how I do it. I just generally LOVE the independence. As I said before, I'm very grateful and appreciative to EVERYONE involved". Matthew (2010)

Over Coming my Fears by Cathy Slater (2010)

Matthew is a very bright and independent 22 year old young man. Matt has always been a joy, having a wicked and witty sense of humour and a particularly admirable philosophical view of his world and his situation.

Matt has high support needs. Although he doesn't have an intellectual disability he is VERY physically dependant on others to meet his needs (from eating, dressing, going to the toilet and even turning in the night). Matt also has difficulty with verbal speech.

From a mum's perspective it would, be fair to say, supporting Matt to meet his needs has been a lot of work! Meeting Matt's physical needs has meant that we have had to relinquish many things in life that most take for granted. We also have a very real and daunting angst about his future.

At 18 ½, Matt said to us **"I think it's about time we thought about me moving out into a place of my own"**. WHAT ! How in the world are we going to do this!!!!

I have always had a very strong 'won't be beaten' attitude but this was seriously going to put me to the test! My first obstacle was myself of course! I thought "No-one can look after Matt like I can; I know every little need without being told; What will happen if he can't make himself understood?" Matt's response to this was "Mum, I'll be alright. I want to do this". I had to work hard to not allow my fears to get in the way. This was Matt's journey and his deepest wish to 'move on'. I had to support it, give it all I could and, if by some miracle it worked there was the solution to my fears for his future, beyond us being able to care for him.

For two years I made phone calls, came up with plans and hit lots of dead ends. It was around this time that the most advantageous connection happened. I met Deb Rouget, Manager of Personalised Lifestyle Assistance (PLA). Along with attending a series of particularly inspiring workshops that PLA organised, Deb enthusiastically engaged in private meetings with Matt and myself, to help us identify his vision and support needs and put a plan and proposal together to enable Matt to live in his own place. This was presented to the Department of Human Services (DHS) and subsequently supported.

One lesson that sticks with me mostly from the PLA workshops I attended was the innate right of ALL individuals to pursue their own life. That although we all use services for our 'survival', some may require more than others, it's still possible for people with disabilities to have the same opportunities and develop their independence if the "right" services and supports are in place.

The second most important lesson is that you can neither anticipate EVERY need nor wait until every 'T' is crossed and every 'I' is dotted to initiate this sort of undertaking. It simply would never happen! There are always too many variables and too many unknowns. This is the way life is!

After about five months after contacting a Real Estate Agent we had a phone call from an agent regarding an appropriate unit. We went and had a look, with a resounding 'I'll take it' from Matthew. Carers were handpicked by Matt and ourselves and sourced through Country Care (a flawless and wonderful service). Matthew went from strength to strength. Making his own arrangements and enthusiastically rising to his new challenges. He loved his independence!

Matt loves his new life. He is as independent as he can feasibly be. He often surprises us with new achievements like doing his own shopping, buying us a gift, making his own arrangements and getting about down the street on his own like any other person.

We are so proud of him. It takes a good degree of bravery and determination for someone so vulnerable. However, I must say, it takes a lot of 'bravery' on the part of us parents too!!

The difference to our lives as "carers" is amazing. But not a pinch on the satisfaction that Matt now enjoys. We're all 'winners'!